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ABSTRACT

This publication is designed as a briefing for personnel working at all levels in agency programs focused on serving the disadvantaged section of the urban community. Described principally are: the productive activities of counselors staffing these programs and the supervisory rationale stated. A counseling program designed to meet the needs of the urban poor, it is held, must provide a way for people to make sense of their total experiences; a logical and economical way to do this is to assume responsibility for coordinating activities and providing many needed services. The use of an organization which is flexible as to size of groups as needed is contended as being able to provide more service and more intensive service than is now available; counselors assuming these responsibilities will need opportunities of examining and working with alternative ideas and solutions. A comprehensive program of staff development including counselor-supervisor meetings, extensive use of tapes, group conferences, monthly regional conferences, annual conferences, and a thirty-hour inservice training course is suggested in the counselor-supervisor helping relationship. The goal of developing a counseling organization by the supervisor integrated and responsive to its clients is held to be imperative of final achievement in facing the challenge of serving the poor. (RJ)

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COUNSELING
the
URBAN POOR

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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
BUREAU OF GUIDANCE ALBANY, NEW YORK 12224

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PREFACE

This publication is essentially a briefing for personnel working at all levels in agency programs focused to serve the poor sector of the urban community. Described principally are: the productive activities of counselors staffing these programs and the supervisory rationale both stated and specifically detailed by two supervisors as they developed counseling service staffs for trainees in Manpower Development and Training Centers in New York City.

The basic substance of this brochure, including topical areas, emerged from a paper produced and presented at the December 1968 Conference of the American Vocational Association by Mrs. Rose Sealy and Mrs. Shirley Ford, Supervisors of Manpower Development and Training Centers in New York City. The Bureau of Guidance sponsored their American Vocational Association agenda contribution. Bureau personnel have visited programs in the city with Mrs. Sealy and Mrs. Ford and consider what these ladies have developed to be pertinent and useful to their peers in similar programs. The editor and coordinator of this publication is Burton L. Thelander, Supervisor, Bureau of Guidance.

COUNSELING THE URBAN POOR

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INTRODUCTION

The newest consumers of counseling services are the urban poor. The urban poor are more easily described by their differences than by their similarities. There are many groups which have been in the past identified as needing counseling, special programs, and services. Those whom counselors have traditionally served are the atypical learner, the dropout, and the mentally disturbed. Increasingly, counselors are involved in programs which serve new clients:

Adults: returning veterans, under-employed and displaced workers, women returning to the labor market, immigrants for whom English is a second language

Minority groups: Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Blacks, and migrants; and

Minority youth in special school and community programs.

These persons have special needs because so many of them have been living outside the main stream of economic and social life.

Since our society has never been able to develop new counseling services quickly enough to meet the normal growth needs of regular school and agency programs, the increasing demand for services by new clients creates a dilemma. How can counseling services which are already over-extended serve even more clients? How can programs often criticized as not being "in touch" with many students be adapted to serve increasing numbers of new and "different" clients? How can we do a new task when

there is widespread agreement that counselors are inadequately prepared in many graduate counselor education programs? Added to this handicap there is seldom sufficient money allotted for staff to provide a counselor-client ratio which is favorable enough to assure that current procedures for their services can work. It is obviously necessary to reverse a situation in which clients consistently report that counseling services are unsatisfactory to them. We need to look at the experiences of those who have initiated and operated programs to serve the poor. We have found that where there has been an opportunity in certain agencies to try new procedures, to select and develop staff, and to experiment with various approaches to working with people in training, new ideas and approaches have emerged. Some of the most promising activities of those which have been tried in programs for the poor are:

The use of group processes with larger groups and for many purposes,

The use of paraprofessionals,

New counseling approaches based on behavioral science,

Inservice education on the job to improve counselor performance,and

New ways of assistance by using the counselor.

Increased counselor involvement and commitment can make possible an integrated program which can be evaluated and changed in the process of giving service.

AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM

An integrated program is one in which the experiences of the client both inside and outside of the agency are related and can make sense to him. All learning is related to his plans. If his plans are for a job, school work will be directly focused on the skills needed for a job known to be currently available to him in the labor market. If his plans are for further training or education, he must clearly know his current learnings will lead to that goal. The counselor assumes a large responsibility for helping the learner clarify his goals so that all learning becomes a part of his personal plan. Possible handicaps to his personal plan are identified and understood with the help of the counselor. One client's handicaps may include poor spelling, chronic arthritis, and a mentally disturbed child at home, all compounded and complicated by his lack of skill in dealing with agency people. The counselor has the responsibility for assisting the client to develop a plan to improve each of these situations, for gaining teaching and other staff acceptance of the client situation and staff cooperation in pursuing his plan. If it becomes necessary for the client to change his plan, it is the responsibility of the counselor to help him learn new behaviors to serve the new goal. To summarize, an integrated counseling program provides encouragement and support on a regular basis for each person, and counseling assistance so that each person can do better those things he must do anyway.

To achieve an integrated program, there must be frequent contacts among all who serve the same client; many frequently needed services must be brought into the agency or school on a regular basis, and the counselor must function as part of a helping team. Counseling staff will attend regularly scheduled meetings between agencies. Communication procedures are most vital to report action taken by each agency on behalf of the same client. Paraprofessionals and counseling interns participate in planning and maintaining these reports. Services brought into the school or agency for counselor use should include:

Health information, health screening (as for diabetes and tuberculosis)

Consumer information, social security, savings, insurance

Housing information, applications for public housing

Job, college and career information, applications, and interviews

Community services, child care

The counselor will work typically on a team to include: the community health worker, the employment service counselor, and remediation specialists, all serving the same client at the same time.

Orientation and Choice Making

The most urgent counseling needs of the urban poor are help to carry on their daily responsibilities; to lessen the impact of the damage from previous failures, and for help in learning new behaviors necessary to achieve goals they set for themselves. These big jobs for counselors cannot be accomplished using present counseling practices which fail to

reach most people. Counseling must be available to each person regularly, but especially at the point when there are new experiences to be faced and when choices must be made. Regularly scheduled large group meetings will be used to give information about all aspects of a new experience. For example, when students enter a new program, a large orientation meeting can involve such activities as:

Slides or a film describing the program

"Live" or taped reports of how previous students have dealt with their problems of adjusting to the program

Discussions by staff members of what they will teach

A video tape by an employer (on the advisory board) about jobs closely related to the training

Distribution of a printed Fact Sheet to each student.

Large orientation meetings are then followed by small group meetings to deal with any further questions and finally by individual counseling sessions as these are needed. In this way, every individual gets guidance and support from members of the helping team and is better able to handle change effectively. The individual counseling time is reserved for those individuals who need it.

THE COUNSELING PROCESS: NEW TACTICS ARE MANDATORY

The urban poor are not being served well by most counseling programs. Learning how to serve these new consumers is a high-priority goal for counselors.

To effectively serve the urban poor, certain needed improvements must be made in the counseling process. Most important of these changes are:

first, there must be regular access to the counselor and second, that counseling must "work" for most people. The inadequate counselor-client ratio can be overcome by scheduling all clients to meet with counselors on a regular basis in groups of 12 to 17 clients. These developmental groups are for the purpose of assisting each to deal with problems of everyday living and learning and how to make better decisions. One principal advantage of working in groups is that peers share common problems and can learn how to help each other with ideas. The individual member learns many problem-solving skills in the group setting. When problems are inappropriate to deal with in the group, the counselor must be available to clients individually. In addition, individual conferences are regularly scheduled with all clients so that a joint evaluation of progress can be made, new priorities established, and both counselor and client can see how the counseling process is "working" for each person.

Since the client's ability to respond and change is related to the level of the counselor's skill, counselors need the ability to demonstrate their acceptance of the clients as individuals with their own patterns of beliefs, problems, behaviors, and needs. Counselors should develop skills in communicating both their professional concern and their professional confidence in their ability to affecting change. The professional counseling approach used must be simple, clear, and free of any counseling "mystique."

The counseling process described here shows counselors co-ordinating the many services clients need to adjust to learning and to change. The counselor's responsibility and role are crucial.

THE COUNSELOR STAFF

Recruitment

The recruitment and training of counselors who can relate and work successfully with youth and with the urban poor are severely challenging the resources of the personnel departments of even well established organizations. Recruitment and training problems are even more difficult for short term programs which offer services and training. Whereas most established organizations have, through trial and error, developed procedures for the selection and inservice training of new counselors, this is not generally true for the agencies which are funded annually.

Most short term programs offer few benefits such as salary increments, paid holidays, sick leave, security, and a chance for advancement. Posed is a two-fold problem: first, to recruit counselors who can work effectively with youth and with poor people and second, to select those counselors who can see some advantages in working in new agencies and in new ways.

What kind of counselors are needed to work with today's youth and with the urban poor and how can they be trained? These are urgent questions for those who have the responsibility for "reaching" people and involving them in their self-development plans.

SELECTION

Counselor Criteria

Clients, whether youth or the urban poor, are often faced with the necessity for learning and for changing themselves in a relatively short period of time. Counselors who can help them are those who have developed a positive attitude toward change in individuals and who can counsel

effectively in a changing situation. Counseling programs often experience many changes as offices expand, proposals are amended, and services are reduced or increased. Both schools and agencies may be located in renovated older buildings with unsatisfactory offices, immovable furniture, and inadequate space for group counseling. Counselors need to be flexible if they are not to become immobilized by their own frustrations.

Clients, in the main, are poor and socially underdeveloped youth and adults who may need counseling in areas of:

dealing with authority

feelings about race, or status

handling anger and conflict

making goal-directed choices

self-esteem

To help clients with difficulties which result from the experience of having been left out of the mainstream of the economy, it is important that prospective counselors have effectively resolved their own feelings in these sensitive areas. A counselor who is unaware of his own unresolved feelings concerning prejudice, authority, and racial issues will be handicapped in working with youth and with the urban poor. The counselor who can be empathic, and not sympathetic, is very much needed.

Experience Criteria

It is recommended that counselors for youth and for the poor need a minimum of 1 year's experience working in agencies which serve the same people. In general, counselors' skills in individual counseling are greater than their skills in group counseling. The counselor's willingness to improve his professional skills with groups under supervision and

commitment to participate in inservice training must be considered in the selection of counselors.

Counselor Needs, Expectations

Schools and agencies attempting to select counselors must be aware of those aspects of their program which can attract the staff they need.

While many counselors are attracted by a high pay rate, some are also interested in an opportunity to improve their skills in individual and group counseling in a supervised work setting. Counselors in the process of working toward graduate degrees find the possibility of flexible work schedules an important convenience. Other counselors are interested in gaining more experience working with special groups. There are those beginning counselors who prefer work with the smaller case loads of short term programs to the security and larger case loads in more permanent organizations. In spite of the temporary nature of many programs, prospective counselors can be found whose needs attract them to the agency. The selection process must be designed to make a marriage between counselor needs and agency needs.

The Screening Interview

It is most difficult to evaluate, during a single interview, whether a counselor has the desired personal characteristics and the required skills and understandings.[1] It is useful when interviewing to use an open-ended situation to which the applicant is asked to respond. For

[1]Since the selection of counselors is crucial to the success of the counseling program, the person who selects the counselors must be knowledgeable about counseling. It is strongly recommended that where the administrator or personnel department is not familiar with both counselor education and the counseling program of the agency, the task of screening applicants and making recommendations about hiring counselors be delegated to others, such as a senior counselor or a committee of counselors.

example, the prospective counselor may be asked to respond to the following:

> "If in group counseling, several individuals criticize you because they perceive you to be part of the Establishment, what would you do?"

In this situation the interviewer is not looking for "correct" responses but rather for an approach to problem solving. Implicit or explicit in counselors' responses are clues to their understanding of the helping relationship, the dynamics of behavior, and their knowledge about communicating with the poor.

Preparation of Counselors For Service to the Poor

In addition to personal characteristics such as flexibility, understanding of youth and of poor, empathy, and commitment to change, counselors need specific professional preparation.

Counselors for the urban poor may appropriately be recruited from various related areas of academic preparation such as: social work, clinical psychology, vocational rehabilitation, and human relations as well as from guidance and counseling programs. Regardless of the field of preparation each counselor needs to have gained certain common understandings about human growth and behavior, learning, and ways of working with people both individually and in groups. It is recommended that courses be required in these areas:

1. Foundation Course: Principles, Basic Aspects of the Field.
2. Understanding the Individual: Dynamics of Behavior, Needs and Characteristics of the Individual.

3. Techniques: The Basic Preparation Required For Counselor Certification in This State.
4. Group Dynamics: Group Work, Group Processes, Social Psychology.
5. Occupational Information or Placement.
6. Measurement, Statistics, and Appraisal.

Supervised practicums, sometimes including field work in individual and group counseling are being included in counselor training by an increasing number of graduate programs.[2] A well organized and supervised practicum experience may provide the beginning counselor more opportunity to develop skills in working with the poor than a year of paid experience in an agency. An appropriate practicum experience of supervised counseling should therefore be accepted in lieu of 1 year of paid experience.

SUPERVISION OF COUNSELORS

Philosophy

The supervisor-counselor helping relationship parallels the counselor-client helping relationship. In each dyad, interests, the value system, and feelings of each participant must be respected at all times. In both instances the helper must work in a way which demonstrates a philosophy about the basic nature of man; that man is responsive, capable of making his own decisions, and is a person of worth and dignity. Finally, the counselor and the supervisor both work in either individual or group situations.

[2]The practicum or field experience varies from one institution to another and it is the responsibility of the hiring agency to learn the nature of the practicum or field experience of a counselor applicant.

Supervision Priorities

Just as the counselor looks for individual differences among clients and considers these strengths and weaknesses, so does the supervisor in working with the counselor. The main objective of the early phase of supervision is for the counselor and supervisor to agree upon priorities for supervision.

The very first priority of supervision is to discover the counselor's orientation, his actual performance on the job, and see whether it "works" and does help people. Even though there is no single counseling approach or psychological orientation proved through experience to be successful with poor people, what we know about the psychoanalytic and other non-directive counseling approaches indicates that these are not appropriate nor realistic for helping large members of poor people in a relatively short period of time. There is increasing evidence to support the notion that counseling which teaches problem solving behavior and is directed toward "here and now" difficulties can really help people who need to change.

The second priority in supervision is to identify skill areas possessed by the counselor in which he may begin to work. It may be decided that one counselor needs to work on the appropriateness of his intervention in group counseling; another needs to work on making joint plans with clients to deal with their current problems; and still another needs to focus on making the best use, on an overall basis, of his time. Other examples of priorities for counselor supervision should include counselor improvement in:

Diagnosing group needs.

Learning how the counselor's behavior affects the group.

Planning for group work.

Developing techniques for record keeping.

Teaching groups how to use the group processes.

Working with open-ended groups.

Leadership skills:

less talking

more listening

Avoiding evaluative responses to clients.

Working with the hard-to-reach client.

Assisting clients to clarify their goals.

Interpreting agency policy.

Accepting and handling feedback from clients.

SPECIFIC PRACTICES AND TECHNIQUES

The tape recorder is highly recommended as a tool for counselors of the urban poor. Counselors who listen to tapes of their interaction with clients become more sensitive not only to clients' skills in various areas but to their own professional skills. Counselors are thus assisted to become self-evaluative and self-supervising. The tape is used to produce valuable feedback for counselors. During supervisory conferences, counselors learn to use feedback in a self-correcting way.

The counselor and supervisor listen to the tape together, stopping at strategic points for questioning and clarification. The interaction between counselor and supervisor at the first taped listening session is

crucial to the success of future supervisory sessions. Everything which is done must establish the understanding that the purpose of supervision is to help the counselor develop the self-correcting habit. For example, when the supervisor hears a counselor's statement on the tape and questions its appropriateness, it is effective to ask the counselor what he was trying to achieve by making statement "X". This question could be followed with, "Did it work? Why? What other alternatives are open to you?" Here the supervisor is working on the assumption that the counselor <u>has</u> a rationale for his intervention and if it is discovered that this is not the case, then the counselor becomes aware of his shortcoming without the supervisor telling him. The more opportunity counselors are given to make their own decisions about what they have to work on, the faster they will move to improve their behavior and the more "open" they will be in future supervisory sessions. The counselor does the same in working with clients, specifically he creates an environment for clients to focus on their "choice system" and learn goal-directed behavior. Evaluation of a tape is not an end in itself, but a beginning for the counselor to try out new ways of discovering and viewing the counseling relationship.

In addition to individual counselor-supervisor conferences, supervision also takes place in staff groups. Counselors need to share in preparing the agenda for regularly scheduled group conferences. Suggested activities for group conferences are:

1. A counselor plays a tape of his individual or group session for the total counseling staff. He has specific questions he wants the group to deal with.

2. A counselor presents a case for the group. Here the emphasis may be on getting help from his colleagues on what else can be done or on developing a common approach to dealing with a client.
3. Discussion of the problems of clients in the same vocational course of study. For example, how do needs of clients in the nursing course differ from those of clients in commercial training areas.
4. Information sharing session on themes such as: how to work with the "angry" client, the "quiet" group, the client who refuses to accept his academic shortcomings, conflict in the group, teacher-student problems, locating appropriate agencies, and developing working relationships with other agencies.

System-wide and Regional Counselor Meetings

Monthly, regional inservice training conferences are needed as an adjunct to on-site supervision. Since many schools and agencies are scattered throughout the city, counselors often feel isolated. Monthly regional conferences allow counselors in each area to meet and exchange ideas. Here, too, counselors share in agenda making and participate in the conferences. Activities at such conferences involve both large and small group participation. Essential themes:

New areas in counseling theory.

An evaluation of current record keeping procedures.

The social work approach.

The use of video tapes in group work.

New programs and services to trainees (students).

The team approach.

Effective ways of working with other agencies.

Planning for group work.

The counselor's case load.

Supervisors provide counselors with information on significant professional conferences both in and out of the state. All supervisory conferences benefit the supervisor as much as they do the counselor. The supervisor learns about counselors' problems, listens to the counselors' recommendations for improving the department, and finds out what materials counselors need to do a more effective job.

An annual city-wide conference is valuable for unifying and strengthening relationships between counselors and other staff members in the program and between counselors and outside agencies which will be invited. Counselors and supervisors work as a team both in planning and in participating in these conferences. Whatever work is done by a counselor to prepare to present a tape, discuss a particular counseling technique or theory which has been effective, helps the counselor clarify his own ideas and improve his own skills. The supervisor may serve as summarizer. Following each conference, supervisors ask counselors and other observers for feedback which will improve future conferences. Team work between counselors and supervisors decreases the "status" gap between the two and provides opportunities for counselors to exercise leadership, demonstrate skills, and get useful information from their colleagues and coworkers.

LOCAL INSERVICE CRUCIAL

Since graduate programs are generally not relevant to the problems of poor people, counselors are often ill-prepared to serve the urban poor. School systems and agencies must set up their own inservice training courses for new counselors and others being assigned to work with the poor. The course has two important purposes: first, to increase the counselor's awareness of his own needs, values, and ways of working with people; and second, to develop some models for working effectively to change behavior. These important tasks will require at least fifteen 2- or 3-hour sessions, with one-half of each session being used for didactic presentation and discussion and the other half for a group experience. Counselors need the experience of group membership with the responsibility for working to change their own behavior since in their professional role they will deal with "changing behavior." The ideal arrangement is for counselors and supervisors to attend the course at the end of the work session and be paid for their time. Since training is crucially important, if the ideal arrangement is not possible, counselors and supervisors must agree, as a condition of employment, to participate in the course on a voluntary basis.

SUMMARY

The Program

A counseling program which would meet the needs of the urban poor must provide a way for people to make sense of their total experiences. A logical and economical way to do this is for counselors and others on the helping team to assume responsibility for coordinating activities and providing many needed services on site at the agency or school. It is important for counselors to be available to their clients on a regular basis. The use of an organization which includes large groups, small groups, and individual sessions as needed, can provide more service and more intensive service than is now available. The counselors who assume these responsibilities will regularly need support and guidance and an opportunity to confront themselves and their ways of working with alternative ideas and approaches.

The Supervision

A comprehensive program of staff development including counselor-supervisor conferences, extensive use of tapes, group conferences, monthly regional conferences, annual conferences, and a 30 hour inservice training course have been suggested.

The goal of developing a counseling organization by the supervisor integrated and responsive to its clients is not new, but faced with the challenge of serving the urban poor, finally must be achieved.